

Collegiality

How Things Work at Capilano College

Why this document?

Comments made during the first round of the Collegial Task Force have led me to believe that there is a need to review some of the history of how the management and governance of our college evolved. By doing this I would like to try to put into perspective the current review of the collegial process, and to provide my perspective on collegiality.

There has been a very rapid pace of change over the last few years, much of it out of our control - but not all. We have made some strategic choices and taken some actions that have contributed to this change that we all feel.

History

When we started, there was the new and largely untested concept of a Community College whose major role was seen to be, at least by the North Shore and Howe Sound residents, to offer first and second year university transfer courses. Given the demographics of the college this was probably to be expected, and in fact the tremendous success of this part of the college curriculum carried the college for many years and still comprises the largest program area. The college was new, the faculty were new and the energy was unlimited. But some of the early administration, and Board, were stuck in a high school extension or "Grade 13" mentality. The College was, after all, a creation of three school districts and they appointed half of the Board. In these early years even the curriculum was reviewed by the Board and changes required a Board motion - albeit in most cases pro-forma. Faculty members, particularly those fresh from universities where the debates of the sixties had raged, found the governance stifling. The vehicle used to attain and retain a voice in the management and governance of the college was the faculty union.

The labour history of the college, the disputes over management structure, the distinction between credit and non-credit courses - all of these issues are part of the baggage we carry from those early days.

There were many issues of struggle and conflict throughout the eighties. Many of us may have forgotten, or never realized, that Capilano gained a province wide reputation as the College at the forefront of labour conflict.

Fortunately some maturity set in and both the administration and the union recognized that, although there would always be issues and areas of conflict, working cooperatively would most benefit the college and the people who study and work here.

Two Cultures, One Result

The excellence of the College was quite quickly recognized in the academic studies area. Academic departments established the processes and procedures that enabled them to manage their operations and to deliver their courses. So very early in the College's history the operation of the Academic programs was established within guidelines that were

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understood by both faculty and the administration and which, by and large, encouraged academic independence and responsibility at the department or division level.

In the rapidly developing career and vocational areas of the college, the program diversity and differing expectations resulted in a much less uniform style of operations. Faculty numbers were small in the specialized programs and this resulted in much more flexible operating procedures. The program units were given significant responsibility both within the college and with industry representatives to develop new ideas that did not have to meet the needs of the universities. Both the administration and the faculty union tolerated this situation because of the innovation and the lack of conflict within the programs. It was a form of benign neglect that resulted in strong program ownership by the faculty and quite independent operating units.

The result is that all departments in all areas of the College were, and are, very independent entities.

So who runs this place anyhow?

The reality is that everyone does. The full time equivalent persons in the faculty administrative complement (coordinators) outnumber the exempt educational administrators by a factor of three to one and by a factor of six or seven to one in headcount. The teaching areas are fundamentally independent units for the purposes of the courses and programs they offer. The smooth functioning of these areas depends upon the staff and the faculty arriving at appropriate decisions and actions which advance their goals within the context of the College's Mission and policies. The exempt administration, to a large extent, should be involved only when there are matters which span departments (and on which there is no consensus) or involve contractual matters or resource allocation.

All of our actions are restricted by the College policies that are themselves derived from the Board or Education Council. When the question "Who runs this place?" is asked, what is really meant, I think, is who is accountable for the actions. Accountability is complex and is either derived from legislation, from delegation, or by contractual agreement. In the College, all of these types of accountability exist.

Legislative Framework

When the College was started the legislation essentially gave all authority to the Board (unlike the Universities Act which had a Senate). Initially the local School Boards and the Government appointed the Board. The faculty was not unionized. The removal of local School Board representation did not change the governance structure significantly. With unionization the Board entered into legal agreements with the faculty, and thereby agreed to specific processes, but essentially the Board retained the legislative authority and responsibility for all College operations. Much of this authority was formally delegated to the President by Board policy. (constrained of course by Board resolutions and specific policy). This delegation by the Board to the administration, through the President, remains in effect, modified from time to time by different Boards.

What was changed by legislation is the scope of the Board's authority and how that authority is to be exercised. The change to the College and Institutes Act, which created the Education Councils (as well as broadening the representation on the Board) delegated some of the Board's former authority to the new Council. Furthermore it required that the

processes by which many of the former Board policy prerogatives are exercised also involve this new body. From an operational perspective, the President, and hence the administration, now had two bodies which delegated their respective authorities as they saw fit. The authority to act, and to be accountable, however remains to the President, restricted by policies and by legal contracts, such as collective agreements. Much of the Board's legislative responsibility to consult and then act, on a wide range of operational policies, is also delegated to the President, and hence to the administration.

The administration of the College is through the Executive Management and the other administrators. Coordinators are administrators and the Deans and the Deans Advisory Committees, as well as the many College wide committees, are part of the administrative structure. DAC advice and recommendations are part of the administrative process. For administrative efficiency some administrative recommendations go from DAC directly to sub committees of the Education Council, but these are delegated administrative actions.

The members of the Board or the Education Council are not appointed or elected as representatives of any constituency or administrative group. Rather their task is to establish policies within which the College Mission is to be carried out by the administration, including the DACs. The advice of the administration, including the advice of DAC, may well be, in fact one would hope should be, considered as important. But it should be clear that the Board or the Education Council are the governance bodies.

Because the governance bodies have the final authority, it is important that they ensure that the policy advice of the appropriate stakeholders is considered and that this consultation is done in a collegial manner.

Our Complex Environment

There are other factors in addition to our newly complicated legislative framework that contribute to making our working environment complex. We have as a result of the faculty collective agreement, which determines both principles and processes by which faculty share in the management of the institution, created operational requirements that often strain our administrative capacity. Our government and Ministry reporting requirements have increased dramatically. Financial accountability in the public sector is a high profile issue. In many cases these administrative demands can be met only if we have standardized processes and procedures or else we increase the number of persons whose task it is to collect and massage the required data. Our budget has not provided for increased staffing, so we rely heavily on process being followed, on consistency and observation of timelines by all levels of administration. When this does not occur, there is significant stress placed on those who are accountable for the correctness of our actions.

Strategic Direction, Independence of Action and Accountability

In recognition of the financial realities which have faced and continue to face the College, the Strategic Directions included increasing the development of alternative funding sources. Such a direction requires that the units of the college that are responding to this direction be able to respond quickly, and have considerable independence of action. In fact this concept is embedded within the strategic directions document. The College has created a flat administrative structure and has delegated specific responsibilities to the faculty areas. The mandate to develop alternative funding has been given to the departments.

With the added responsibility has come a limited form of accountability. Limited because many of the traditional accountability measures, such as budget, external contracts etc. are still by Board policy the responsibility of the President, and by extension the administration. The nature of the faculty contractual relationship is such that accountability for faculty administrative actions that result in college liability is minimal.

Defining Collegiality

We have, in our own unique way, defined a Collegial Model in our faculty collective agreement. It speaks to decisions being made in the appropriate functional areas, to consultation, and to working collectively to serve the needs of the College Community. It recognizes that the Board, or the Education Council, cannot give away its authority without appropriate accountability by carefully defining the areas in which decisions can be made by different segments of the administration, including coordinators. It does not unfortunately speak to the manner of working collectively - to the nature of the interactions or to the value and the respect each member of the collective team should have for each other.

The Three C's - Collegiality, Consultation and Conflict

Collegiality is related to the interaction of the formal governance and administrative structures with the people who must work within the established policies and regulations. Although the formal powers of the President are quite encompassing, he or she would soon bring the institution grinding to a halt by acting in a dictatorial or arbitrary manner. Coordinators, who are the administrators with whom faculty interact most directly, have to act collegially not only within their area but also with other administrators if they are to accomplish their objectives.

Conflict is normal. Conflict does not mean there is no collegiality. One can be collegial and disagree.

Collegiality is not consultation. One can consult, receive advice and accept advice, or not, without being collegial. Governments do this all the time. Collegial consultation requires that the manner of interaction is mutually respectful. Collegiality may mean that no consultation is necessary because the perspectives on any particular issue are well understood or because there is no realistic option within the timelines for action. In a collegial environment there is a measure of trust that the correct action has been taken.

Disagreement does not mean lack of collegiality or lack of consultation. Ultimately, in many situations a decision has to be taken. Lack of consensus is not a lack of collegiality. Different perspectives will result in different conclusions but the decision must be made by whomever is accountable.

Collegiality does mean respect - respect for both the person and the process. If either is abused, collegiality breaks down because arguably the most important component of a collegial relationship is trust. If trust is in place, then responsibility can be delegated without formally delegating accountability, and actions without formal consultation can be taken that are not seen as inappropriate. Collegiality is the recognition of everyone's role in a complex management and governance structure. Collegiality is trusting and valuing other peoples' judgments and acting appropriately in a manner that engenders the trust of others. Trust however must be earned and sustained and this is best accomplished by respecting

both the person and the process.

Collegiality exists when everyone can trust and respect that the actions of others will be self directed, responsible and within the established processes and policies of the institution. If our action, or lack of action, causes problems in the very complex environment we have created for ourselves, then collegiality will suffer because trust will disappear.

What's next?

We have evolved a special and effective method of managing the diverse interests of Capilano College. The Collegial Model has worked and still works, - but in some areas more effectively than in others. However, like all evolutionary processes it must continue to grow and change. The current review of our collegial processes is intended to ensure that we conduct our affairs in the best possible manner. I look forward to the results of our work.